

Wisconsin

Department of Natural Resources

NEWS

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SPECIAL EDITION

2005 Fall Hunting Seasons Forecast

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Dear Wisconsin Hunter:

By DNR Secretary Scott Hassett

It's been quite a year. Over the past 12 months I've had a chance to meet and talk to many of you as I traveled the state, answering your questions about how we spend your hunting and fishing license dollars and why the Governor put fee increases in his budget.

I want to thank you for listening to me and assure you I've enjoyed every minute of it. I greatly appreciate the support you show for Wisconsin's natural resources; our waters, our forests, our fish and wildlife and our way of life.

Last year you registered Wisconsin's second highest ever state deer harvest which incidentally was also the fourth highest whitetail harvest in the hunting record books. Over the years the model we use for estimating size of the deer herd – the SAK Model – has been pretty accurate at predicting the annual harvest but that doesn't mean it couldn't stand improvement if changes will make it even more accurate.

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With advice from a broad group of stakeholders we are commissioning a third party audit of the SAK model in the coming year. The audit will look at the basic assumptions and inputs to the model and let us know if we're doing the best job we can. I will be very interested in what they find and you can be certain we'll share a full report with you.

Good hunting and fishing depend on quality habitat and access to that habitat. I don't need to tell you that it's getting harder to find quality hunting and fishing places open to public access. In Wisconsin we're fortunate to have the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund which has given hunters and anglers such properties as the Peshtigo River State Forest, the Turtle Flambeau and Willow Flowages, Bill Cross Rapids, the Turtle Valley Wildlife Area and Jefferson Marsh.

Right now, the Stewardship Fund is a hot topic in the legislature. Fifteen years after it was developed by a non-partisan alliance of lawmakers, a wrong-headed few of our current legislators just do not like this program. They have repeatedly tried to cut into the \$60 million of annual funding earmarked for the program. This is shortsighted and wrong. Stewardship takes advantage of once in a lifetime opportunities to buy land or easements that provide hunting and fishing opportunity. It keeps access affordable and I urge you to get behind Stewardship. Talk about it or write your legislators, letting them know your feelings on this issue.

Good luck in your fall seasons, have fun and be safe.

Scott Hassett
DNR Secretary

2005 Deer Season Forecast

MADISON – In 2004 Wisconsin deer hunters harvested more than 517,000 deer, setting the second highest single season deer harvest total in Wisconsin’s deer hunting history. The total included record archery and muzzleloader harvests of 103,572 and 7,074 deer respectively. The 2004 total is only surpassed by the 2000 season when Wisconsin hunters set a national record harvesting over 617,000 deer.

In 2005 Wisconsin’s deer herd remains above population goals and is projected to be around 1.4 to 1.5 million animals going into the hunting season. While progress has been made reducing the deer population closer to goal in recent years, Wisconsin’s deer managers say an aggressive antlerless harvest is needed to continue to move the population toward goal. In Deer Management Units (DMUs), above goal, the department will continue to set aggressive antlerless quotas in an effort to reduce deer numbers. In these units there will be plenty of antlerless permits available for hunters that want the opportunity to harvest antlerless deer. Wildlife managers emphasize that if the gains made in reducing the size of the herd are lost, more herd control efforts will be needed in the future.

“There will be excellent deer hunting opportunity this fall and total season long harvest is expected to be around 400,000 to 450,000,” according to Keith Warnke, DNR big game ecologist. “As a result of extensive Earn a Buck (EAB) units last fall, there will be more older bucks in those units this fall. Aggressive antlerless deer harvests reduce the harvest pressure on bucks meaning more older bucks are available for harvest in future seasons.”

There are other tangible benefits to herd control say biologists. Keeping populations at goal through aggressive antlerless harvests reduces agricultural damages and vehicle-deer collisions; promotes forest regeneration by reducing browsing pressure, enhances forest diversity, and puts the hunter in a high profile and valued role as a contributor to the conservation of everyone’s natural resources.

Getting the deer herd to goal levels and maintaining it there is something that will benefit Wisconsin. Hunters are encouraged to take an antlerless deer (or two) if the opportunity presents itself.

Zone T in 2005

Forty-five deer management units (DMUs) are designated as Zone T for the 2005 deer hunting season. Zone T units are DMUs where it is projected that the traditional deer season framework would not reduce the deer population to within 20 percent of that unit’s over winter (or post-hunt) population goal.

To increase the antlerless harvest and reduce the deer population in these units, 4-day antlerless-only gun hunts are implemented in October and/or December. DMUs north of Hwy. 8 are not included in the December Zone T season.

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Similar to last year, hunters will again receive one free antlerless tag with the purchase of a deer hunting license. This means a total of two free antlerless tags for Patron License holders and hunters that purchase both a gun and archery hunting license.

The free antlerless tags may be used to tag an antlerless deer in any Zone T or CWD unit. Hunters should check the 2005 DMU map to see which units are designated for Zone T in 2005.

Antlerless Tags

In addition to Zone T units, some regular DMUs will have antlerless permits available for hunters who wish to harvest additional antlerless deer. Antlerless deer carcass tags will be available for purchase (\$12 resident, \$20 non-resident) online or at any Wisconsin hunting license sales location beginning at noon on Saturday, August 27.

CWD Deer Management Units

Deer management units, including state park units, located in the Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Eradication Zone and the Herd Reduction Zone will again have special regulations for the 2005 season.

DMUs 54B CWD, 70 CWD, 70A CWD, 70B CWD, 70C, 70D, 70E CWD, 70F, 70G CWD, 71 CWD, 73B CWD, 73E CWD, 75A CWD, 75B, 75C CWD, 75D CWD, 76 CWD, 76A CWD, 76M CWD, and 77A CWD, 77B CWD, and 77C CWD will have extended gun and archery seasons and also have a unlimited Earn-a-Buck season structure for part of the season.

The unlimited earn-a-buck structure requires a hunter to harvest an antlerless deer before they are legally eligible to harvest an antlered buck. Hunters planning on hunting one of the CWD Zones should review the 2005 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet, available in August in hard copy and online, for specific details on hunting dates, rules, and zone boundaries.

Youth Hunt

The third annual Youth Deer Hunt will be Saturday Oct. 29, 2005. This special one-day hunt was established to provide more youth deer hunting opportunity. The hunt will be held in any regular deer management unit (except state park and other non-quota units). Any licensed hunter can already hunt in a Zone T or CWD unit on this day.

Youth hunters ages 12 to 15 who have successfully completed a hunter education program may participate in the hunt. Qualified hunters may harvest one antlerless deer per hunter's choice or bonus permit in the unit that the permit was issued for. All hunters with the exception of waterfowl hunters are required to meet blaze orange requirements on this day. For more information on the youth hunt, check the 2005 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet.

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State Park and Metro Deer Management Units

Deer hunting in State Park units 23A, 52A, 57D, 61A, 69C, 72A, 73A, 77D, and 80C is again by limited draw. Hunters wishing to hunt in these State Park units must have applied for access using the 2005 Hunter's Choice Application by August 1 (a \$3 application fee is required, except for Conservation Patron license holders). Special season dates, hours, and area restrictions may apply within the parks; this information will be mailed to successful applicants.

Metro units 1M, 59M, 60M, 64M, and 77M are designated as Zone T units in 2005. These metro units also have special deer hunting season dates. Hunters should review the 2005 Wisconsin Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet, available in hard copy and online in August, for season dates in these units. Check local ordinances on firearm and bow use before hunting because many areas within the borders of the Metro Units do not allow firearm discharge and some may not allow the discharge of bow and arrow, or crossbow.

Wisconsin deer hunting regulations are online at

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/regs/index.htm>.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Brad Koele - (608) 261-7589 or log onto the DNR Deer web page

Season Dates

Archery:

Sept. 17 – Nov. 17

Nov. 28 – Jan. 3, 2006

NOTE: Archery Harvest in all Zone T units is restricted to antlerless deer only from Oct. 27 – 30. Archery harvest in Zone T units south of Hwy. 8 also is restricted to antlerless deer only from Dec. 8 - 11. All DMUs (Zone T and regular) north of Hwy. 8 are either-sex from Nov. 28 – Jan 3, 2006.

Gun:

Early Zone T: Oct. 27 – 33 (antlerless only)

Regular gun: Nov. 19 – 27

Late Zone T: Dec. 8 - 11 (antlerless only and only in units south of HWY. 8)

Muzzleloader: Nov. 28 – Dec. 7

Youth Hunt: Oct. 29

Disabled Hunt: Oct. 1 –9

Chronic Wasting Disease Zones:

Eradication Zone:

Gun: Oct. 27 – Nov. 13 (Earn-a-Buck)

Nov. 19 – Jan. 3 (Either-Sex)

Herd Reduction Zone:

Gun: Oct. 27 – 30 (Earn-a-Buck)

Nov. 19 – Jan. 3 (Either-Sex)

Archery in both Zones:

September 17 – Oct. 26 (Either-Sex)

Oct. 27 – Nov. 18 (Earn-a-Buck)

Nov. 19 – Jan. 3 (Either-Sex)

NOTE: Archery hunters are required to meet blaze orange requirements during all gun deer hunting seasons.

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Regional Forecasts

South Central Region

By Carl Batha, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (608) 935-1922

The South Central Region has some of the most productive deer habitat in Wisconsin. The combination of rolling hills and valleys, abundant agriculture and mild winters is about as good as it gets for the white-tailed deer. In non-CWD units hunters can expect a robust fall deer season with all units near or above unit goals. There should be good hunting, like last year.

Herd size in CWD Units has been reduced about 50 percent from the all time highs of the late 1990s. Earn – a – Buck requirements have been relaxed in CWD units for 2005. Archery and gun hunters will have many days of either-sex hunting this year. Also on the plus-side is the age structure of the herd in CWD units. The age of the deer available to the hunter will be older due in part to the emphasis on antlerless harvest in the CWD management effort.

In the 2002-04 deer seasons 38 percent of bucks harvested were 2.5 years old and 22 percent were 3.5 years or older. In this country, any deer that reaches 3 years of age will be a monster, clearly trophy caliber. While CWD management has reduced overall populations in CWD units, the remaining deer, upwards of 60% of the population, are all older. This is unprecedented in the Midwest. Expect trophy bucks to be taken.

Northeast Region

By Tom Bahti, Regional Wildlife Supervisor (920) 492-5827

As the Department begins another round of CWD surveillance throughout Wisconsin, the Northeast Region (NER) has been selected as the first region to begin this three-year-long process. Adult deer brought in by cooperating hunters will be sampled during the October Zone T hunt and the opening weekend of the gun deer season at various registration stations throughout the region. Some of the more northern units in the NER (those with no Zone T season) may have “drop off” locations available during the early archery season and cooperating meat processors may also be utilized throughout the fall. These locations will be well publicized and hunters are urged to bring in their adult bucks and does for this important surveillance effort. While the massive sampling effort of 2002 did not find CWD anywhere in the NER, continued vigilance and surveillance is paramount to the management of this disease.

Hunters will find a gradient of deer numbers and hunting opportunities as they move north to south across the NER in 2005.

Deer management units (DMUs) in northern Oconto and Marinette counties (40, 41, 44, 45 and 50) have deer populations at or slightly below prescribed management goals. These units will have conventional “bucks plus antlerless quota” seasons, and the availability of hunter’s choice and bonus permits will vary depending on population status.

Winter severity in northeast Wisconsin was low last winter and excellent fawn production and antler growth is expected. DMUs 40, 45 and 50 have limited antlerless quotas to allow the populations to increase, and not all applicants will receive a hunter’s choice permit.

DMUs 41 and 44 have populations at goal, and the opportunity for hunter’s choice permits is very good, with some bonus antlerless permits to be issued as well.

In the “middle North” of Oconto and Marinette counties (DMUs 49A and 49B), deer populations have increased, and liberal antlerless quotas have been prescribed to bring these units to prescribed population levels. All applicants will receive hunter’s choice permits and abundant bonus antlerless permits will be available. These units can be managed this year with a bucks plus quota season, but it is important for hunters to take adequate numbers of antlerless deer to keep the populations in check.

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For the remaining southern two-thirds of the region deer populations remain well above population goals. While the 2004 Zone T/Earn-a-Buck seasons were successful in beginning to stabilize or reduce deer populations in the agriculture/forest fringe and agricultural landscape, these DMUs continue to have deer populations that are far in excess of prescribed over-winter goals. All 18 of these units would meet criteria for Earn-a-Buck (EAB) season structure if that management tool were being used in 2005.

In place of Earn-a-buck which is not being used in 2005 all these units will have Zone T seasons. In addition to the free antlerless tag issued this year with each license, there are unlimited additional antlerless permits available in these units for. Deer hunting opportunities will be outstanding, and it is important for hunters to take advantage.

The results of the 2004 EAB season will be strikingly evident in those units. Antlered buck to antlerless ratios are much improved, hunters will see a much higher percentage of 2.5 year old bucks this fall, and there will also be some carry-over of 3.5 year old bucks into the harvest. It is critical that hunters in these Zone T units continue to keep the pressure on antlerless deer, as EAB will be once again considered in 2006 if populations are not reduced towards biologically and socially acceptable levels.

Northern Region

By Mike Zeckmeister, regional wildlife supervisor (715) 623-4190

All of the special herd reduction units from last year show a downward trend in deer populations. In other words, they are closer to the overwinter goal. It is anticipated that after the 2005 season, more of these units will be closer if not at goal because of increased antlerless harvest associated with the early October season. This early antlerless-only season is a highly effective herd reduction tool in the Northern Forest. A high number of deer management units were near goal this past winter and due to the mild-moderate winter conditions herd growth is expected to increase. Therefore, liberal antlerless quotas were set for these units.

Southeast Region

By Jim McNelly, regional wildlife supervisor (414) 263-8710

Deer populations are highly variable in this part of the state due to the variety of habitat conditions and hunting pressure. Hunting pressure is very high on all public lands and many private landowners restrict hunting access to friends and relatives. Those hunters wishing to hunt on lands in this region are encouraged to get out and meet landowners to get permission to hunt and scout well before the season. Hunters should always check with local townships and village offices to see if there are any prohibitions on the firearm or archery equipment safety ordinances.

All of Deer Management Unit (DMU) 77B and the southern portion of DMU 77C will fall within CWD management zones. Southern Walworth and extreme western Racine Counties are within a Disease Eradication Zone and much of the remainder of 77B and 77C fall into a Herd Reduction Zone. These designations indicate that hunters can harvest multiple deer using an unlimited Either Sex or a mandatory Earn-a-Buck format, depending upon when they hunt within the new 2005 CWD deer season frame work. Archery and gun hunters should carefully examine the 2005 deer hunting regulations to ensure they understand the rules for the portion of the season that they are hunting in CWD management zones. We are depending on hunters to help us eliminate Chronic Wasting Disease in southern Walworth and western Racine Counties and to help create a reduced deer population area in the remainder of the Herd Reduction Zone to stop the spread of this disease. Hunters should carefully review the new regulations for this area and note that deer taken from these zones must be registered within 24 hours of harvest and registered at stations within the zone.

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The anticipated deer harvest within the southeast region will likely be similar to 2004 due to a relatively mild winter. A Zone T antlerless hunt in DMU 69 and a slightly reduced deer population in the CWD Management Zones increased harvest of antlerless deer in 2004. Hunters who are planning to hunt DMU 69 will be hunting under a Zone T format during the October 27-30 and Dec. 8-11 antlerless gun deer seasons. All hunters (with the exception of waterfowl hunters) are required to wear blaze orange when hunting in this unit during Zone T seasons. Refuges within DMU 69 are closed during the October portion of the Zone T hunt. These refuges include Theresa, Sheboygan Marsh waterfowl refuges and the Zillmer Trail Refuge in the Northern Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest. The Theresa and Sheboygan Marsh refuges will be open for gun deer hunting during the December portion of the Zone T antlerless deer hunt.

Hunters who hunt in the Disease Eradication Zone or Herd Reduction Zone will be required to have their adult deer tested for Chronic Wasting Disease at the time it is registered. Department wildlife staff and DNR contractors will work with those hunters who wish to have their deer head mounted. These CWD samples are needed from several counties within this region to better define the extent of the disease and to develop strategies to combat it. Sampling will be conducted free of charge and the test results provided to the hunter by the DNR.

Individuals hunting in Racine and Walworth County should pay particular attention 2005 Deer Hunting Regulations pamphlet, as some of each county will be managed as part of the CWD Disease Eradication Zone and Herd Reduction Zone. Please consult the 2005 regulation pamphlet for zone boundaries.

West Central Region

By Robert Michelson, regional wildlife supervisor (715) 839-3736

The West Central Region is again going into the 2005 deer season with good to excessive deer numbers throughout the region.

Many of our agricultural units are above goal and will have herd control (Zone T) seasons to try to lower deer numbers. These units have high deer productivity and in many cases hunter access is limited. It is difficult to harvest the number of antlerless deer necessary to keep pace with annual production (fawns). Many landowners are beginning to understand the need to harvest substantial numbers of does to limit production and keep deer numbers at a healthy level.

The Central Forest units in the Region have somewhat lower productivity and more public land for good hunter access. Hunters have been successful in keeping these units near goal and all Central Forest Units will have regular season frameworks (bucks plus quota).

Herd Control (Zone T Units) in WCR include: 22A, 27, 46, 54B, 57, 57B, 59B, 59C, 59M, 60A, 60M, 61, 62A, 65A, 72 and 74A.

Regular Season (bucks plus antlerless quota units) in WCR include: 33, 53, 54A, 54C, 55, 56, 57A, 57C, 58, 59A, 60B and 74B.

In WCR there will be limited sampling for CWD in portions of Portage and Crawford Counties only. This targeted testing is to assure the disease has not spread from deer farms in those counties. Hunter concern for the disease has been reduced following statewide testing in 2002 and participation and interest in deer hunting is up.

We expect 2005 to be another excellent year to hunt deer in the WCR.

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Chronic Wasting Disease update

By Alan Crossley, CWD Project Leader, DNR Bureau of Wildlife Management

Wisconsin is entering its fourth year of CWD management. During the first three years of the CWD control program, extensive testing was conducted across the state to investigate the distribution and prevalence of the disease. We have made significant progress toward reducing the free-ranging deer population in the affected areas, banned the baiting and feeding of deer in these areas to reduce transmission, and have started tracking and controlling CWD in Wisconsin's farmed cervids.

It is currently not possible to predict whether Wisconsin's CWD management program will be successful in eradicating CWD from the state. However, the consequences of not attempting to control the disease or an inadequate response are clear: the prevalence and geographic distribution of CWD will increase as will the impacts on the deer hunting culture of Wisconsin and related industries and businesses.

Statewide surveys continue to show that 70 to 80 percent of Wisconsin hunters think CWD should be eliminated from the wild deer herd, but that doesn't mean that 70 to 80 percent are in lock step with how we are going about it. We have to continue to learn and adapt.

Our approach to managing CWD has been and continues to be herd reduction for disease control. As we learn more about the disease and interact with the public, we continue to modify the hunting rules to achieve our disease control objectives and maintain the support of hunters and landowners.

The details of the CWD seasons for 2005 are finalized and are in the fall regulations pamphlet, which is available online, in DNR service centers and at license vendors. Disease eradication zone hunters should note that there is a five-day break in the deer gun season in the DEZ this year, with no firearm hunting from Nov. 14-18.

All but 23 days of the archery and gun seasons will be either-sex in the CWD zones. Hunters will have to follow Earn-a-Buck regulations from Oct. 27 – Nov. 18. By offering a season that goes from either-sex, to earn-a-buck, to either-sex, we are trying to balance hunter interest in lifting the restrictions that EAB imposes with our desire to continue a high antlerless harvest.

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We have been able to achieve high antlerless harvest rates over the past three years with the Earn-a-buck regulation in the CWD Zones, and shooting lots of antlerless deer reduces the reproductive ability of the herd, thus reducing the deer population.

We have also observed that disease prevalence is higher in older age bucks. Since an Earn-a-Buck season has the effect of saving bucks, we wondered whether we could come up with a season that would hopefully maintain the harvest pressure on antlerless deer while increasing the harvest pressure on bucks.

This year, landowners in the DEZ and hunters they designate will again be able to hunt the DEZ without buying a regular deer hunting license by requesting a DEZ landowner's permit. These permits are available from any license vendor beginning Sept. 1. Hunters will again be able to donate DEZ deer to a food pantry program.

Of the 75,000 deer tested for chronic wasting disease since 2002, 471 have tested CWD-positive. Analysis of the geographic distribution of the southwest Wisconsin outbreak showed that the pattern of positives is not random, but is tightly clustered. More than 80 percent of the positive deer are in a 126 square mile area bounded by Spring Green, Mazomanie, Black Earth, Mount Horeb, and Ridgeway. Within the cluster's core, high-prevalence area, prevalence among adult deer was similar in 2002, 2003, and 2004, approximately 5 percent. Within the center of the core area a few sections had prevalence of 8 to 12 percent. This fall we will begin another round of statewide CWD testing, beginning in the northeast part of the state.

Successfully eradicating CWD from Wisconsin will require a sustained effort over many years and require cooperation and communication among natural resource and agricultural agencies, hunters, landowners and captive cervid producers. CWD is an issue of statewide importance and we strongly feel that aggressive management now, in the early years of the effort, is important to contain the spread of CWD, minimize the size of the affected area and shorten the time needed to eradicate the disease from Wisconsin.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Alan Crossley - (608) 275-3242

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2005 Wisconsin black bear hunting season forecast

By Brad Koele, assistant DNR deer and bear ecologist - (608) 261-7589

MADISON – State wildlife officials estimate the black bear population in Wisconsin going into the fall hunting season is approximately 11,000 animals.

Working with hunters and conservationists, we have done a good job of managing the bear population at ecologically and socially acceptable levels, primarily through hunting efforts. Wisconsin can be proud to boast a healthy and stable black bear population.

This year the department issued 4,731 Class A bear permits and set a harvest goal of 2,500 animals. Interest in bear hunting has risen steadily over the years. For the 2005 season over 66,700 hunters applied for and received either a harvest permit or a preference point. This marks the highest number of applicants since the bear quota system was implemented in 1986.

Last year, hunters harvested 3,063 bears with the highest harvests occurring in Bayfield, Sawyer, and Price counties. Bear Management Zone (BMZ) A1 led the state with a harvest of 987 bears followed by zones A (924), B (658), and C (494).

The 2005 Bear hunting season begins September 7 with hound hunters going first.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Brad Koele - (608) 261-7589

Bear forecasts by DNR Region

Northern Region

Bear quotas were set to reflect population trends which will result in a higher harvest goal in Zone C and Zone A, reduced in Zone A1, and the same high goal for Zone B. The number of permits issued will vary due to past success rates. When success rates increase, fewer permits are issued to meet the harvest goal. For example, the harvest goal for Zone B is the same as last year but the number of permits available will be less due to the higher success rate. Overall, bear are very plentiful in Northern Wisconsin and many areas too numerous.

Northeast Region

A healthy bear population in the Zone B portion of the northeast region should provide hunters with plenty of opportunity during the 2005 harvest season. Bait station surveys and bear nuisance complaints are close to those indices from 2004. In Zone C, the bear population continues to thrive and expand. Public land hunting opportunities are more limited in this portion of the region so hunters with a Zone C tag should consider contacting private landowners early to establish a place to hunt. Hounds are not allowed during the harvest season in this zone. As with Zone B, soft mast may affect visitation to bait sites so hunters may want to establish multiple hunting areas.

West Central Region

Except for the extreme northeast corner of Chippewa County, all the 19 county West Central Region lies within Bear Management Zone C. This means that even though bear dogs can be trained in this zone, bear hunters cannot use dogs during the hunting season. Zone C has the longest hunting season of all four zones, starting on Sept. 7 and running through Oct. 11.

Last year's Zone C harvest was 494 bear. This came very close to the quota of 500. This excellent harvest was a result of good weather conditions and a healthy bear population that visited bait sites on a regular basis. As bear extend their range to the south, kills are showing up in Counties that have not historically had harvests.

This fall's harvest quota is 600. This quota translates to a permit level of 1580 compared to 1250 in 2004. Some hunters with 4 preference points and all hunters with 5 or more were offered a permit. This increase in permit levels and a healthy and growing bear population should result in an excellent 2005 bear hunting season in the West Central Region.

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Early spring waterfowl surveys present mixed picture

MADISON – Variable spring habitat conditions observed in the US and Canada present a mixed picture of the fall 2005 waterfowling season according to DNR waterfowl biologists. Wildlife managers in the US and Canada reported wetland conditions ranging from very good to very dry. How these conditions actually affect breeding waterfowl numbers will be revealed when all survey work is completed and seasons are set, traditionally in mid to late August.

Ducks

Wetland conditions

Canada – Waterfowl breeding areas in Canada entered spring with poor to good conditions, however, conditions improved and by the time ducks were beginning to nest wetland conditions ranged from poor in southern Alberta to very good in Manitoba. Continued spring rainfall has maintained or improved breeding waterfowl conditions across much of Canada.

U.S. Prairies – Early spring habitat conditions were dry and likely had a negative effect on duck pair numbers and distribution. However, conditions improved across the eastern portions of the Dakotas and western Minnesota after most ducks began to nest, a situation Kent Van Horn, DNR migratory waterfowl ecologist, said should improve brood survival for those birds that did nest or attempted to renest.

Wisconsin – Warm temperatures and dry conditions characterized the early spring in Wisconsin. At the time of the Wisconsin Breeding Waterfowl Survey in early May, most areas of the state had poor to average wetland conditions. “While we have had rain in some areas around the state, overall wetland conditions have continued to decline,” says Van Horn. “These poor and declining habitat conditions will likely have a negative impact on brood survival and overall production.”

Duck populations

The four most abundant ducks in Wisconsin’s fall hunting harvest are mallards, wood ducks, green-winged teal and blue-winged teal. Of these four, green-winged are the only species that is not a major breeder in Wisconsin. It is significant to note that most of Wisconsin’s duck harvest comes from birds that breed in Wisconsin rather than from the prairies or boreal forests to the west and north of Wisconsin according to Van Horn.

This year’s survey conducted in early May appeared to be well timed as biologists saw few migrant groups. This year’s survey results indicate that an upward trend in numbers of breeding mallards, wood ducks and total ducks, continues. The total duck population estimate was 724,000 which is up 11 percent from 2004 and 75 percent above the long-term average.

“In addition to the science of the survey, experience plays a role,” said Van Horn. “There are many things that can impact the results of a single year’s survey results. That’s why it’s important to look at the long-term and recent trends in populations rather than focus only on year to year variations in

order to get a real feel for how populations are doing in the long haul,” says said Van Horn. “It appears that in 2005 duck breeding in Wisconsin is consistent with a 20-year long increasing trend in the total duck population with this year’s breeding numbers about average in comparison to the last five years.”

Mallards

“Because they are the most abundant duck in Wisconsin’s harvest at nearly 40 percent of the total harvest, breeding mallards are an important gauge of potential fall waterfowl numbers,” says Van Horn. “Our Wisconsin breeding population estimate for mallards is 317,000 which is up from 2004 (229,000) and 81 percent above the long term average. This figure is similar to the average for the previous five years.”

Blue-winged Teal

The breeding population estimate for blue-winged teal in Wisconsin is difficult to interpret in 2005 according to Van Horn. Blue-winged teal populations have shown a generally decreasing trend over the last 30 years but survey results from 2004 appeared to reverse that trend.

“We suspected that the 2004 population estimate for blue-winged teal might have been inflated because migratory blue-winged teal were still moving through Wisconsin during the survey period and were counted with the resident ducks, explained Van Horn. “Discounting the 2004 results, we expected a population estimate of around 100,000 based on the 30-year trend. But instead, this year’s estimate showed 195,239 a decrease of only nine percent over the 2004 estimate. We will have to see what the next couple years bring to see if the long term decline in breeding blue-winged teal has been reversed.”

Wood ducks

“Wood ducks continue to increase their in-state breeding populations. This is very encouraging as these ducks have become a major portion of the fall harvest at 16 percent, says Van Horn. “The Wisconsin breeding population estimate for wood ducks is 141,000 which is up 23 percent from 2004 and is 103 percent above the long term average.”

Canada Geese

The information on Ontario breeding Canada geese in 2005 is encouraging following one of the poorest breeding years on record during 2004.

“There are two different populations of Canada geese that are present in Wisconsin during the regular fall hunting season,” says Van Horn. “One population, called giant Canada geese, nests in Wisconsin. A population of slightly smaller birds nests in northern Ontario along the coast of Hudson Bay and then migrates through Wisconsin and other Midwestern states. The latter is called the Mississippi Valley Population (MVP). Results from the most current banding data indicate that 61 percent of Wisconsin’s regular goose season harvest comes from the MVP.

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“An early spring produced very good breeding conditions for the MVP Canada geese in Ontario this year and it appears that the adult breeders are poised to help the population recover with a good production year.”

The breeding survey of MVP Canada geese estimated 345,000 breeding adults. The breeding survey showed a 25 percent increase from 2004 numbers but was still a little lower than the average of the previous 16 years. The harvest of MVP geese is shared by several other states and provinces so harvest quotas are set to protect the breeding population and distribute harvest among several states. While higher than 2004 it does not appear that the population has recovered to a level which would allow a more liberal Canada goose harvest quota.

The 2005 breeding population estimate for giant Canada geese nesting in Wisconsin showed a 17 percent decline from 2004. However, the 2005 estimate of 124,000 is still well above the long-term average of 67,000 and is generally consistent with a growing population of Canada geese nesting in Wisconsin.

Canada goose seasons

Exterior Zones (including Brown and Rock Prairie subzones)

- **North Zone:** Sept. 17 through Sept. 23 and Sept. 24 at noon through Dec. 17. Daily Bag Limit: 1 Canada goose from Sept. 17 – Oct. 2 and 2 Canada geese from Oct. 3 – Dec. 17
- **South Zone:** Sept. 17 through Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at noon through Dec. 17. Daily Bag Limit: 1 Canada goose from Sept. 17 – Oct. 2 and 2 Canada geese from Oct. 3 – Dec. 17.
- **Mississippi River Subzone:** Oct. 1 at noon – Oct. 9 and Oct. 15 – Dec. 14 (500 bird quota). Daily Bag Limit: 1 Canada goose Oct. 1-2 and 2 Canada geese from Oct. 3-9 and Oct. 15 – Dec. 14

Other geese

- **Brant and white-fronts.** Seasons are the same as for the Canada goose zones and subzones. Daily Bag Limit: 1 brant and 1 white-fronted goose
- **Light geese (Snow, Blue and Ross).** Seasons are the same as for the Canada goose zones and subzones. Daily Bag Limit: 10 (Wisconsin hunters only harvest a few hundred of these geese each year but they are overabundant in the US)

Burnette County Subzone: Closed

Horicon/Collins Time Periods

Hunters with Horicon and Collins Zone permits will be issued up to 4 tags for the time period that they are awarded.

- **Horicon Zone** Daily Bag Limit: 2 geese with a possession limit of the number of tags issued.
 - Period 1 Sept. 16 – 30 and Oct. 1 at noon – Oct. 16
 - Period 2 Sept. 24 – 30 and Oct. 1 at noon – Oct. 28
 - Period 3 Oct. 15 – Nov. 18
 - Period 4 Oct. 31 – Dec. 16
- **Collins Zone** Daily Bag Limit: 2 geese with a possession limit of the number of tags issued.
 - Period 1 Sept. 16 – 30 and Oct. 1 at noon – Oct. 2;
 - Period 2 Oct. 3 – Oct. 23
 - Period 3 Oct. 24– Nov. 18

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kent Van Horn - (608) 266-8841

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Upland wildlife 2005 fall forecast

Ring-necked pheasant

The DNR will stock selected public hunting grounds this fall with 34,000 game farm pheasants. This is an increase from 2004 when 19,000 game farm pheasants were stocked. Please check the special pheasant hunting regulations and the general hunting regulations and be aware of the counties in which a pheasant stamp is required and which public hunting grounds have a 2 p.m. closure and/or allow hen pheasant hunting.

Hen hunting properties were selected because they had no wild hens on or near them. It is illegal to shoot hen pheasants anywhere else in Wisconsin, except on licensed game farms. Such shooting would harm Wisconsin's wild pheasant population.

Results from this year's rural mail carrier pheasant survey indicates a two percent increase in the number of pheasants observed by rural mail carriers per 100 miles driven. In addition, preliminary estimates from this spring's pheasant crowing cock survey indicates a stable wild pheasant population statewide.

"Generally it appears that the population has shown little change over the past year," said Andrea Mezera, acting upland wildlife ecologist "This is good news since many other upland bird populations were impacted by the cool, wet weather we experienced in the spring of 2004. Weather such like that generally has a negative effect on brood productivity and survival."

Another indicator of pheasant populations, the Brood Survey, should be available in August.

Where to look:

Areas within the pheasant management counties that contain adequate winter cover - cattail and shrub-carr marshes and thick switch grass fields - and have more than 15 percent of the landscape in idle grassland will have the highest pheasant densities.

In Wisconsin, research has shown that wetlands are one of the most important year-round cover types for pheasants. It will be important for hunters to identify areas with high quality habitat and concentrate hunting efforts in that area.

Over the long-term throughout the Midwest, pheasant populations have shown a decline. Changes in pheasant populations have coincided with changing agriculture and land use patterns. Pheasants once relied on small grain and hay fields for nesting and brood rearing. These areas are now being replaced with larger row crops of corn and soybeans.

A pheasant stamp is required to hunt pheasants in pheasant management zones. From October 15-16, the daily bag limit is 1 cock and possession limit is 2. For the remainder of the season the daily bag limit is 2 cocks and the possession limit is 4. Some public hunting grounds have both hen and cock pheasant hunting (requires free permits and tags) and /or 2 p.m. closure times. See the special pheasant regulations for details.

Season open: Oct. 15 (noon) – Dec. 31 Statewide

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Wild turkey

This fall, 85,400 wild turkey permits will be available to hunters. This is a slight increase in permits compared to last fall when 78,900 permits were given out. Poult, or turkey-young-of-the-year counts will be completed in August and should provide us with additional information on brood survival.

The Wisconsin turkey population now extends well into the northern part of the state. Expansion is in part due to mild winters, available habitat and expanded habitat development and improvement.

During the fall turkeys spend more than 90 percent of the daylight hours in hardwood habitats. Both brood flocks and adult male flocks make extensive use of areas dominated by oak and hickory. Turkey hunters should monitor the acorn crop in the area they hunt, as the success or failure of acorns will determine where turkeys will be feeding. In years of poor acorn production, turkeys spend proportionately more time in cornfields.

Since most turkey hunting occurs on private land it is important to keep landowner relationships a high priority. Landowners in Wisconsin are usually willing to allow hunters to use their land as long as they ask politely for permission to do so.

Bag limit is one turkey of any age or sex per hunting approval notice.

Season open: Oct. 1 – Nov. 9

Ruffed grouse

The 2005 ruffed grouse spring drumming survey showed a 10% decrease statewide in the number of drumming grouse heard during roadside surveys compared to last spring. The statewide average was 0.60 drums per stop in 2005 vs. 0.67 in 2004. Both the northern and southwest region of the state saw a decline in drumming activity. We are currently on the downward side of the 10-year grouse population cycle that peaked in 1999. Biologists expect numbers to begin climbing in about a year or two. Depending upon the hatching success this spring, grouse numbers may begin to slowly increase this year.

While it is likely there will be fewer grouse in the bag this year it's a time to scout new hunting areas. Hunters will not find uniformly high numbers of grouse across the landscape. They will need to seek good habitat for ruffed grouse hunting this year and may have to move around to find the pockets where good numbers of birds can be found. Ruffed grouse use a variety of habitat types, but young, early successional forest types are most important when trying to find a good grouse hunting location.

The bag and possession limits are 5 and 10, respectively, in the northern and western zones and 2 and 4 in the eastern zone.

Season open:

Zone A (northern) Sept. 17- Dec. 31

Zone B (western) Sept. 17 – Jan. 31, 2006

Zone C (eastern) Oct. 15 – Dec. 8

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Sharp-tailed grouse

A total of 780 permits will be available for the fall 2005 sharp-tailed grouse hunting season. This is a decrease of 220 permits from the 2004 season. A total of three units will share the available permits. For management purposes, sharp-tailed grouse management units use the same boundaries and designations as deer management units (DMU). Those units with sharp-tail permits available for fall 2005 are: DMU 2 (620 permits), DMU 9 (110 permits), and DMU 10 (50 permits).

All hunters interested in hunting sharp-tailed grouse must apply by application process. Applications cost \$3 and are due August 1st. Hunters are encouraged to carefully review the zone map and apply for units that are open. Applying for closed units will result in an invalid application.

The sharp-tailed grouse is native to Wisconsin's barrens and savannas and is currently only found in that remaining habitat. Dancing ground surveys indicate that populations of sharp-tails were low this spring. Last fall, just over 470 applicants applied for 1,000 permits. Hunters harvested 40 birds during the 2004 season. Because sharp-tailed grouse numbers are low, birds will be more difficult to find. We would like to emphasize that the opportunity to find sharp-tailed grouse is limited and difficult; hunters are encouraged to hunt for the experience, and not for the opportunity to harvest a bird.

Season open: Oct. 15 – Nov. 6

Squirrel, Gray and Fox

Acorn production should pick up this fall compared to last year's variable crop and squirrel hunting opportunity should follow suit. The mild winter allowed for excellent over winter survival and this spring should have resulted in good squirrel litter production. Squirrel hunting is an excellent opportunity for getting those first-time hunters out in the woods.

Daily bag limit is 5, possession is 10. Flying squirrels are protected and can not be legally hunted.

Season open: Sept. 17 – Jan. 31, 2006

Rabbits, Cottontail and Jackrabbit

The past mild winter and early spring should mean good survival and productivity and increased rabbit hunting opportunity throughout Wisconsin this fall. The best rabbit hunting areas may be in the west-central part of the state where brushy fence rows and agriculture provide excellent rabbit habitat. Bag limits for cottontail and jackrabbit is 3 possession limit is 6. Cottontail hunting remains open until February 28 and can provide a great late winter hunt.

Season open:

Cottontail rabbit

Northern zone Sept. 17 – Feb. 28, 2006

Southern zone Oct. 15 (noon) – Feb. 28, 2006

Jackrabbit: Statewide, Oct. 15 (noon) – Nov. 15

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2005-2006 Fall Furbearer Forecast

By John Olson, DNR Furbearer Specialist.

Wisconsin is blessed with a wonderful diversity of both common and unique members of this interesting group of wildlife. Beaver, coyote, raccoon, and muskrat are good examples of the more abundant and common species across our large state.

In contrast, the more secretive bobcat, fisher and otter are doing well in the North and slowly expanding southward. And then there's the marten, still an endangered species and barely holding its own in two small regions of the North.

At this time of the year many folks begin to ask in anticipation, "how are things going out there," or, "what can I expect to see this fall?" In a nutshell, furbearer populations are doing well and in some areas are a challenge due to high numbers. From bear hunters to berry pickers, people are interested in what they can expect this fall and winter.

Raccoon

Raccoons are found in a wide variety of both rural and urban habitats. Those areas close to a wetland or farmland mosaic have the highest populations but even the northern forests are now home to raccoons.

We have large populations of raccoons with the highest densities in the southern one-half of the state. Raccoon are still very abundant in all counties in a wide variety of habitats - often to nuisance levels"

Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist for Vernon County in southwestern Wisconsin reports that raccoons are again very abundant and underutilized by trappers in southwestern Wisconsin. Tom Isaac, wildlife biologist from Ozaukee and Washington counties reports raccoons are more abundant than ever in a wide variety of habitats. And at the same time John Christian, conservation warden from Horicon reports "raccoon are coming out of the woodwork!"

Wildlife managers suggest that this will be a good year to train a young dog or ask permission to trap on new lands. Raccoon is a species where landowner permission to hunt or trap is normally not a problem, but ask for permission early instead of waiting until just prior to the season opener.

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The raccoon season opens statewide for residents on Oct. 15, 2005 with the exception of the Mississippi River Zone where the season opens with the muskrat and mink season.

Raccoon season: Oct. 15 – Jan. 31, 2006.

Except: Mississippi River zone, which opens day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November which ever occurs first through Jan 31, 2006.

Bag Limit: None

Beaver

With the average Wisconsin beaver pelt selling for \$20 at international auctions, interest in this furbearer remains stable and is expected to continue so through the 2005-2006 season. Longer seasons, initiated in the 1980s, have helped to reduce beaver populations as planned, especially in northeastern Wisconsin.

Statewide, the beaver population estimate is around 80,000 animals and has not shown any signs of ill health from density-dependent wetland diseases such as botulism or tularemia.

Regionally, beaver numbers in southern Wisconsin appear to be stable to increasing while intensive aerial surveys, conducted every three to four years in northern beaver management zones, indicate a stable population of approximately 40,000 beaver in northwestern Wisconsin, known as Zone A and around 21,000 in northeastern Wisconsin, known as Zone B.

Pat Beringer, wildlife biologist for Price County (which straddles the zone A and B line) reports that beaver populations remain stable, with high numbers still found in remote areas where accessibility is limited.

In Zone B, where more intensive management programs exist, the population has been drawn down to a level where damage to trout streams and town roads is manageable. Because beaver populations are now at acceptable levels, the trapping season in Wisconsin will open in early November, rather than mid-October, and Zone C will close the end of March rather than the end of April.

Season:

Zone A (Northwest) Nov.5 – Apr 30, 2006

Zone B (Northeast) Nov.5 – Apr 30, 2006

Zone C (South) Nov.5 – Mar 31, 2006

Zone D (Mississippi River) Day after duck season closes to Mar 15, 2006

Bag limit: None

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Otter

Factors that have an impact on beaver populations have similar effects on otter, according to Jolene Kuehn, DNR assistant furbearer specialist.

“They have similar habitat preferences but exist together well since beaver are herbivores that prefer the inner bark of aspen, willow and cottonwood for food and their branches for construction of dams and lodges, otters prefer other animals for food, mainly small fish, crayfish and amphibians,” Kuehn says.

Current statewide otter populations are at or slightly below management goals of approximately 13,000 animals. Although a majority of the population is found in the north, otter numbers in central and southern Wisconsin appear to be increasing. They are now present in many of our major river systems of the southwest, namely the Kickapoo, Black, Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers and tributaries.

Otter, like many furbearers found in Wisconsin, are associated with and depend on clean rivers, lakes and streams.

“People interested in otters should thank all those who have worked so hard to improve the water resources of southwestern Wisconsin,” says DNR wildlife biologist, Dave Matheys. “Farmers, landowners, DNR biologists, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Land & Water Conservation Districts and Trout Unlimited to name a few all have contributed to this effort.”

The otter harvest is highly regulated, with permits issued based on estimated fall populations and expected success rates, which are almost three times what they were ten years earlier. This is at a time when fur prices are sky-rocketing and otter pelts are bringing in an average of over \$100 each.

“Permit levels will decrease slightly this year due mainly to increased success rates and careful population management,” says Kuehn. “However, most applicants will receive at least one permit, depending upon the number of applicants in your zone of choice.”

Season:

North zone Oct.5 – Apr 30, 2006

Central zone Oct.5 – March 31, 2006

South zone Oct.5 – March 31, 2006

Bag Limit: One per permit.

Application Deadline: August 1.

Fisher

There are six fisher management zones in Wisconsin. Zones A through D have the highest fisher populations and are located in the northern portion of the state. Zone E is in west central Wisconsin and has a growing population. In Zone E, the best opportunities will be in the northern portions, namely Chippewa, Clark, Eau Claire and Marathon counties, according to John Dunn, wildlife biologist at Eau Claire.

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Zone F includes the remainder of the state and will be open for harvest in 2005 for the second year in a row. In this zone good opportunities exist on the eastern portion, in southern Shawano and Oconto counties and southeastern Marathon.

In all areas, fisher health is exceptional with no known pathogens threatening them.

Strong interest in fisher by tribal and state trappers has resulted in more applicants than permits, especially in Fisher Management Zone A, in northwestern Wisconsin. While permit numbers are up slightly this year the actual number of permit applications received for a zone will determine whether a trapper receives a permit in their zone of choice or is awarded a preference point.

Be sure you have landowner permission prior to applying for any permits.

Season: November 1 – Dec.31 for all zones

Bag Limit: One per permit

Application Deadline: August 1

Bobcat

Bobcat populations have increased across the north with statewide populations at an estimated 3,000 animals. Wildlife biologists in northern and even central portions of the state report an increase in bobcat sightings.

Even though Wisconsin is on the northern edge of bobcat range, the state does have relatively good habitat and mild winters compared to regions north of Lake Superior. Conservative management efforts have allowed for a steady increase in bobcat populations to the current estimated population of approximately 3,000 – a number which allows an average annual harvest of around 250 animals.

Just how many harvest permits will be issued in 2005 will be determined in late summer, when success rates and quotas are calculated. Permit applications always exceed available permits for this elusive predator. A point preference system allows applicants who apply yearly to receive a bobcat tag about every four to five years.

As with fisher and otter, bobcat must be tagged at the point of harvest and registered with a conservation warden. Hunters and trappers keep the pelt, but bobcat carcasses, and in some years otter and fisher carcasses, are collected from the trapper or hunter.

“Registration and carcass collections allow biologists to gather important management information such as harvest pressure, overall age structure of the population, reproductive age, and previous litter sizes,” says Nancy Christel, DNR wildlife biologist at Spooner and active member of the department’s furbearer committee. In 2005, carcasses will be required from all bobcat and fisher from Zones E and F.

Season: Oct. 15 – Dec. 31, 2005 (North of highway 64 only).

Bag Limit: One per permit.

Application Deadline: August 1.

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Coyotes, Foxes and Gray Wolves

Coyotes, the second largest of Wisconsin's native canids, have expanded their range throughout southern and western Wisconsin. In the remainder of the state they continue to do well with their greatest challenge being in established eastern gray wolf territories. In these areas, coyotes have learned to be less vocal and avoid their larger cousin as wolves often treat coyotes as though they were unwanted competition, chasing them off. An adaptable animal, coyotes seem to fair well almost anywhere, especially in rural, urban and suburban settings.

A new tool, called the cable restraint, is now available for use during the latter portion of the existing coyote and fox season, namely from Jan. 1, 2006 to Feb. 15, 2006. After two years of use by licensed trappers things are going well with further studies on the horizon.

According to Steve Hoffman, wildlife biologist from Waupaca, "...this tool was thoroughly tested during three years of science-based research, and was remarkable in its ability to restrain, without injury, any wild or domestic canine." For further information request DNR Publication WM-443-2004, Cable Restraints in Wisconsin, A Guide to Responsible Use.

"Foxes, the smallest of our three native canids, prefers a more rural setting," says DNR wildlife supervisor Tami Ryan from Waukesha, who also reports that, "coyote numbers are stable and steadily increasing in the southeast portion of the state, where they've been known to cause quite a stir around Germantown, Mequon and Port Washington."

Red fox numbers have increased across many areas of the north but mange and coyote competition are impacting populations in western and southern portions of the state. A density dependent disease, sarcoptic mange was observed across Wisconsin in susceptible canid species including red fox, coyote and gray wolf in 2003. Gray fox have fewer cases of mange and appear to be doing well in southern and central Wisconsin.

Wolf Status

Although not a game species in Wisconsin, hunters and trappers may encounter signs of this Wisconsin wild canid. In 2004, Wisconsin completed the process of down listing the eastern gray wolf from the state endangered and threatened species lists, classifying it as a protected wild animal.

Wisconsin's Wolf Management Plan is available on the DNR Web site

<<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/publications/wolfplan/toc.htm>>.

Once similar action is taken by the federal government – removing the gray wolf from the federal endangered and threatened species lists – Wisconsin will have much greater management control over this top predator.

“The federal government had started the down listing process in 2003, moving the eastern gray wolf in Wisconsin from endangered to threatened status,” said Adrian Wydeven, mammalian ecologist from Park Falls. “They were taking steps this year to further downlist the wolf in 2005 until a court challenge in the Pacific Northwest forced them to re-list the gray wolf as a federally endangered species until the lawsuit is resolved.”

At the present time, only designated government trappers, state biologists, or conservation law enforcement officers have special authority from the Fish and Wildlife Service to trap and dispatch wolves when deemed necessary.

The gradual increase in numbers and expansion of the gray wolf across northern and west-central portions of the state offer a unique opportunity for hunters and trappers to observe these wild and wonderful canines.

“We encourage the public to report their observations,” says Wydeven, “especially hunters and trappers who are intimately familiar with their area of the state. This kind of information is valuable to our efforts in monitoring populations. Every observation counts, and we welcome the help.” People can report observation over the Internet through the DNR Web site

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/forms/raremammal.asp>.

Wolf attacks on hunting dogs are rare and most often occur in summer and early fall. The DNR does have a program for reimbursing dog owners for injuries or death caused by wolves. If wolves are suspected of injuring or killing a dog, the incident should be reported as soon as possible to USDA-Wildlife Services at 1-800-228-1368 in northern Wisconsin, or 1-800-433-0688 in central and southern Wisconsin. Investigations by wildlife specialist with USDA-Wildlife Services are necessary before reimbursement payments can be made. The DNR Web site provides information on ways to reduce risk of death and injury to dogs from wolf attacks

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/mammals/wolf/wolfhounddog.htm>.

Trapping Season: Coyote and all fox species:

Northern Zone: Oct. 15 – Feb. 15 (North of US Highway 64)

Southern Zone: Oct. 29 – Feb. 15 (South of Highway 64)

Hunting Season of Coyote:

Year round with seasonal closure during gun deer season in some areas

Hunting Season of Fox:

Oct. 15 - Feb. 15 (North of Highway 64)

Oct. 29 – Feb. 15 (South of Highway 64)

Bag Limit: None

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Muskrat and Mink

Mink and muskrat populations appear to be doing relatively well in most of the state, with pockets of good numbers, and pockets of poor numbers. In the Poynette area conservation warden John Christian notes that “Fresh water inland marshes and riverine systems are again lacking noticeable recruitment in muskrat and mink...”

On a statewide basis, opportunities to trap these species are quite good, as they exist in most areas where permanent water can be found. Season opener for muskrat is October 15 in the North Zone, October 29 in the South and Winnebago Zones, and the day after the duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first in the Mississippi River Zone. For mink the season is now identical to muskrat, opening and closing on the same respective dates, depending on the zone.

Season: Muskrat & Mink:

North zone, Oct.15 – Feb 28, 2006

South zones Oct.29 – Feb 28, 2006

Winnebago zone Oct.29 – March 15, 2006

Mississippi River – begins the day after duck season closes or the second Monday in November, whichever occurs first – Feb 28, 2006

Local ordinances

Some villages, cities, and towns throughout the state, primarily in urban areas, require special permits and also may have ordinances that restrict trapping or the discharge of firearms or bows in certain areas. Check with local town or village offices before you hunt or trap to see if special rules apply! A quality hunting or trapping experience can be found on public or private lands, but pre-season scouting and permission from landowners is critical.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Trapping

In a progressive effort to improve the science of furbearer management, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Trappers Association, Wisconsin Conservation Congress and individual trappers have been actively involved in an international effort to develop Best Management Practices (BMPs) for trapping. This is one of the largest collective trap research efforts ever undertaken anywhere in the world, with the final product being information and suggestions that each state and their trappers can use to improve on animal welfare, trapping in general, and specifically, trapper education.

“Advances in trapping through scientific study, like this effort, are the future of resource management in Wisconsin and in the United States, where our natural resources belong to all citizens,” says Olson.

“If you would like to learn more about furbearers, trapping history, responsibilities and ethics of the modern-day trapper, consider taking the trapper education course offered by the department and taught by dedicated volunteer instructors of the Wisconsin Trappers Association,” invites Virgil Schroeder, president of the Wisconsin Trappers Association.

If you are interested in becoming a trapper, completion of the 12-hour, \$8.00 course is mandatory. To locate a current class near you, contact your local DNR office or check the DNR Internet home page at: dnr.wi.gov

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: John Olson, Furbearer Specialist, (715) 685-2934, or
Jolene Kuehn, assistant furbearer specialist, at (608) 261-6452.

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Dove hunters should look for bands on harvested doves

MADISON – Wisconsin’s third dove hunting season runs Sept 1 - Oct 30. Approximately 15,000 to 20,000 dove hunters are expected to take to the field at some point during the season.

Hunters are being asked to examine harvested doves closely for any leg bands. Wisconsin is participating in a national plan to monitor mourning dove populations for harvest management.

Beginning this year biologists set a goal of capturing and banding 750 doves at several locations in south, central and eastern area of the state with a small aluminum US Fish and Wildlife Service leg band. Hunters who harvest a banded dove are asked to report them to the Bird Banding Lab at 1-800-327-Band (2263), or online at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/homepage/call800>.

This year’s spring call count surveys, coordinated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, estimates the continental population of mourning doves to be in 400 million bird range making it one of the most abundant birds in North America. Populations have actually increased in the two years since the first year of dove hunting opportunity in Wisconsin.

“Regulations and license requirements for dove hunting are contained in the 2005 Small Game Hunting Regulations pamphlet or online,” said Kent VanHorn, migratory gamebird and waterfowl ecologist. “Doves use a wide range of habitats but fields with an abundance of weed seeds or grain, open gravel areas and water sources are all good locations to find doves. Successful hunting is usually a product of good location scouting.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Kent Van Horn – - (608) 266-8841

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Hunting doves has unique safety concerns

MADISON – The opening of Wisconsin’s third mourning dove season (Sept. 1 - Oct. 30) is just around the corner. The smallish, fast-flying bird is especially common in the southern two-thirds of the state. In fact, biologists estimate that some 4 to 5 million mourning doves migrate through Wisconsin each fall.

“In many other states the mourning dove hunt signals the start of the fall hunting season,” said Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. “For many, it’s a social gathering and an opportunity to introduce new hunters to the sport.”

“Because of the unique ways to hunt doves and because of the bird itself, there are some specific safety techniques that all mourning dove hunters should employ,” Lawhern said.

- Carefully check your shells before you enter the field. Use only those designed for dove hunting.
Make sure your gun is plugged to hold no more than three shells.
- Do not load your gun until you’ve reached your hunting location on the field. Unload your gun before you leave.

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- Know the location of other hunters - if any - on the field and make sure they are aware of your location.
- Identify your safe zone of fire and never shoot outside this zone. Your safe zone of fire is the area where you can safely shoot while taking into consideration the location of other hunters, roads and field boundaries.
- Do not shoot at low-flying birds. Always shoot skyward.
- Wear safety glasses or goggles and a cap with a bill to help protect your eyes from falling shot.
- When retrieving downed birds, visually mark the location before you leave your shooting location. Be sure other hunters in the area are aware that you are entering the field.
- Do not attempt to shoot at doves while retrieving a downed bird or when you are away from your shooting location.
- Do not hunt doves outside of the boundaries of the dove field.
- Never shoot a roosting or perching bird. Mourning doves often roost or perch on electrical, telephone, fiber optic or other energy or communication transmission lines. You could be criminally charged for damaging a line in this manner and held responsible for its repair, often costing tens of thousands of dollars.

Lawhern says in addition to these safety tips the basic rules of firearm safety - which are summarized by the initials TAB-K - also apply to dove hunting, or any other species.

In the TAB-K formula for firearm safety, “T” means treat every firearm as if it’s loaded. “A” means always keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction. “B” means to be certain of your target and what lies beyond and “K” means keep your finger out of the trigger guard until you are ready to fire.

According to Lawhern, the mourning dove season is a great opportunity to introduce a new or young hunter to the sport.

“With the dove season starting at a time of the year when warm weather is common, it’s a good chance to introduce a new hunter - young or old - to the sport. Not having to deal with the harsher fall and winter weather of other seasons can make for a much more enjoyable experience.”

Dove Baiting and Feeding

Mourning doves cannot be hunted with the aid of bait. Doves are migratory birds and are subject to the federal baiting regulations that prohibit hunting any migratory game bird with the aid of bait. Even nearby bait that may be legal for another species can attract doves and it would be illegal to hunt them in this situation.

A person can however hunt over manipulated agricultural crops. Federal law states: “nothing...prohibits...the taking of any migratory game birds, except waterfowl, coots and cranes, on or over lands or areas that are not otherwise baited areas, and where grain or other feed has been distributed or scattered solely as the result of manipulation of an agricultural crop or other feed on the land where grown, or solely as a result of normal agricultural operation.”

“Doves are one of the most exciting game birds to hunt. They’re extremely fast and a true test of any hunter’s skills,” Lawhern said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern- (608) 266-1317

Firearm safety should be part of hunting plans

MADISON - As hunters begin preparations to stalk their favorite game during the upcoming fall hunting seasons, Wisconsin safety experts remind them to review firearm safety as part of those initial plans.

Last year, Wisconsin recorded a total of 41 hunting-related firearm injuries with two fatalities. Overall, hunting is getting safer due in large part to mandatory hunter education for those born on or after Jan. 1, 1973. Many adults are also taking a hunter education class as safety certification is required to hunt game in some popular western states.

"We hope the day will come when we'll report that there have been no firearm injuries during any hunting season in Wisconsin," Lawhern said. "But that day will only come when every hunter makes it his or her personal responsibility to practice firearm safety 100 percent of the time.

"All hunters should do their part to create a new tradition in Wisconsin by making our hunting seasons free of firearm injuries," Lawhern concluded.

Essential to any responsible hunting trip is an ironclad adherence to the four basic rules of firearm safety that can be easily recalled by remembering the TAB-K formula.

"Wardens investigate very few, if any, true accidents during any of our hunting seasons," said Tim Lawhern, hunter education administrator with the Department of Natural Resources. "Most of the time, when someone is involved in a shooting incident, the shooter has failed to follow one of the most basic rules of firearm safety covered by TAB-K."

What is TAB-K?

T - Treat every firearm as if it's loaded.

A - Always point your firearm in a safe direction.

B - Be certain of your target and what lies beyond.

K - Keep your finger out of the trigger guard until you are ready to shoot.

"While a hunter may certainly not have intended to harm another person with his or her firearm, the fact remains that most hunting-related firearm injuries result from a violation of one or more of these simple rules," Lawhern said. "It's not an accident when someone disregards safety, it's negligent."

Planning your fall hunting trip also means having your gear in proper working order. Firearms should be cleaned and closely inspected for any signs of mechanical wear that could result in a problem in the field.

But firearms aren't the only items to be checked well in advance of a hunting trip. The clothing that you'll wear and other equipment should also be inspected for signs of wear and tear.

(more)

“Anything that might lead you to compromise safety should be repaired, discarded or replaced,” said Lawhern. “A jacket that doesn’t fit right or a scope that isn’t adjusted correctly could distract you when you ought to be concentrating on safety.”

Game Specific Safety

While the “TAB-K” safety rules can be applied to any hunting situation, there are other general precautions to take when hunting Wisconsin’s various types of game this fall.

Turkey

- Don’t stalk a turkey. Stalking a calling turkey usually means you’re stalking another hunter.
- Be aware of other hunters. Overlapping seasons in the fall means you’re likely to have company. If you’re wearing camouflage, let others know of your whereabouts by shouting out to them.

Waterfowl

- If hunting from a boat or canoe, follow rules of safe boating. Wear lifejackets.
- Wear blaze orange to and from your boat or blind.
- If hunting with a dog, keep your dog’s safety in mind, too.
- Unload your gun before setting it down. A few incidents happen when the dog steps on the trigger, firing the gun.

Small Game (pheasant, upland birds, squirrel, rabbit, fox, raccoon, etc.)

- When hunting birds, know your safe zone of fire at all times. Know where your partners are and where you can safely shoot.
- Be aware that others might be hunting in a nearby field. Look for signs of other hunters such as vehicles in the parking lot or flashes of blaze orange.
- Squirrel hunting is often best in the morning. Carry a flashlight to help walk through woods without stumbling.
- Only shoot at squirrels that have a safe backstop. If you can see daylight behind the squirrel, think of where your shot could go if you miss your target. If you’re shooting a .22 rifle, that bullet could travel a mile or so.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Lawhern - (608) 266-1317

Ethical hunters are ‘Eyes and Ears’ of DNR wardens for catching poachers

MADISON – Wisconsin’s conservation wardens take pride in knowing where to be and when to catch poachers and others who break state environmental and conservation laws. And while there are those who say, “They can’t be everywhere,” there are plenty of ethical hunters and outdoor enthusiasts who are ready to lend a hand - and a phone - when scofflaws are spotted.

Thanks to those well-meaning folks and a small but dedicated group of telephone hotline operators and investigators, there isn’t much in the way of environmental or conservation crime that escapes the scrutiny of a Wisconsin warden.

“The conscientious hunter, angler or outdoor enthusiast is our best ‘undercover’ agent,” said Marilyn Jahnke, a team leader in the special operations section of the bureau of law enforcement. “And we hope that ethical hunters and others will continue lending their eyes and ears to us when hunting seasons get underway this fall.”

The toll-free Turn in Poachers or TIP line number is 1-800-TIP-WDNR or 1-800-847-9367. Subscribers to U.S. Cellular service plans can access the hotline free of charge by dialing #367. All calls to the hotline are confidential and the caller can remain anonymous if he or she chooses so.

“About half of the calls that we’ve had the last few years are from people calling on cellular phones,” Jahnke said. “Those are some of our most useful calls because the person is often witnessing a violation in progress. They can provide very specific information to the operator and it makes for an easier case to close.”

Information can also be shared with the special investigation operators through E-mail at <lawenf@dnr.state.wi.us <mailto:lawenf@dnr.state.wi.us>>.

The DNR poacher tipline has been in operation since 1982 and its operators have answered more than 40,000 calls during that time. During the last year operators handled about 5,000 calls, forwarding just under half of them to conservation wardens for additional follow-up.

Jahnke recalls one recent incident involving a teenage boy who called to report two other teens that he suspected were violating fishing laws. As the ethical young angler was on the phone with an operator the two other boys approached him and an argument began. The operator could hear the shouting match in the background, with the caller telling the other boys that he was on the phone with the DNR and that wardens would be on their way. The two boys then stopped what they were doing and ran off.

Jahnke says that when reporting a violation, try to note as many facts as possible. You will be asked a variety of questions and the more information you can provide, the quicker the violator can be caught and the case successfully brought to completion.

“We’re extremely grateful for all the tips and leads that have been reported to our hotline during the last 20 years,” Jahnke added.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: DNR Law Enforcement Special Operations Team – (608) 267-2774

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Hunters, make your hunt safe and legal

Always ask permission to
hunt on private lands and
remember the formula for gun
hunting safety: “TAB-K”

- T - treat every firearm as if
it is loaded.
- A - always point the muzzle
of your firearm in a safe
direction.
- B - be certain of your target
and what lies beyond and
- K - keep your finger off the
trigger until you’re ready to
shoot.

